

Dukkha in Anicca, Anatta in Dukkha

[Summarised transcription of Dhamma talk no.173]

Q: AN 7.49 continued:

4-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of non-delight in regard to the whole world, their mind draws back from the various beautiful things in the world, and either upekkha or the other side gets established...

Nm: The perception of non-delight is for the uprooting of the inherent delight or joy in regard to the world, senses and sense objects, which is developed by seeing the danger of delight. The word 'delight' refers to that subtle attitude of acceptance or looking forward to something, towards things that are pleasing and agreeable, which are not a problem in themselves. The problem is you being unable to NOT delight in the prospect of pleasure. 'Delighting' means not seeing the inherent danger. If you're seeing the inherent danger in things you are not delighting in them or you will stop delighting. But this non-delight doesn't mean that you hate delightful things, it's just that you will not delight in whatever is agreeable. So if it's agreeable, it's known as agreeable but there's no delight. If it's disagreeable, it's known as disagreeable but there is no resistance to it, which is the opposite of that delight.

Q: You end up no longer attracted to the beautiful things in the world.

Nm: And not being attracted, doesn't mean that beautiful things in the world cease to exist. And by the way, you can't just fabricate non-delight out of thin air. You can only practice non-delight by preventing yourself from delight. And the only way you can prevent yourself from delighting is by contemplating and maintaining the context of the danger in things that you are delighting in. So if you cultivate non-delight, and if you do that long enough, then you don't have to constantly keep reminding yourself of the danger because the danger is inherent in those things. That's why freedom from those things is possible in the first place. And it's by not seeing the danger, that you build up the delight, so to speak, in the course of your lifetime/s.

You can abandon things that are non-essential, like agreeable sight, sound, smell, taste touches, you can restrain from and can say no to all of it. Because you know, the delight in them is bad. But that still doesn't mean you understood the delight simply by saying no to these things, because there are certain things you can't say no to, such as eating. And even the Buddha as a bodhisattva tried to starve himself to see if that would be the way to complete freedom. And he realised that actually, it isn't. It was being done for the wrong reason. In other words, the food was never the problem. So things that you can't just say no to, such as food, that's where you have to practice developing that context of danger in delighting, not that the food you're eating is dangerous, but your delight is the danger that keeps you bound to these aimless wanderings of samsara. And then if there is no delight in food, you wouldn't care what you're eating, good or bad, because however you eat, you eat for the right reasons, And that's what the Buddha said in MN 77, in regards to eating:

"Suppose, Udāyī, my disciples were to respect me because I eat little. Well, there are disciples of mine who eat a cupful of food, or half a cupful; they eat a wood apple or half a wood apple. But sometimes I even eat this bowl full to the brim, or even more. So if it were the case that my disciples were to respect me because I eat little, then those disciples who eat even less would not be respectful towards me..."

He continues in that sutta to debunk ascetic practice in itself as worthy of respect and instead explains that he is respected because he shows them the path out of suffering. His disciples know what is important and what is not. And the quantity or quality of food is not important. Whether you delight or not is important. And If you understand the way out of delight, you wouldn't care if the person who taught you that freedom from suffering is eating six bowls of food etc. Whatever circumstantial action [which is not based on greed, hatred or delusion] that the Buddha did, cannot invalidate the truth of the Dhamma, that he taught them and that they understood. The point is, that if you judge a book by its cover, you will put the cover first and the message of the book second. Even if the 'cover' of the book deteriorates, and doesn't necessarily uphold the greatest standard of ascetic practice, if the message is impenetrable to criticism and has made you free from suffering, then the cover is profoundly inconsequential.

You can measure your practice, not by how much you can go without food and how harsh you live and so on. You measure it, by seeing how free from 'delight' you are, how clear you understand the nature of delight, and how apparent perception of danger in delight is.

Q: "5-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of Anicca, their mind draws back from acquisitions, honours, and fame, and either upekkha or the other side gets established..."

NM: The other side, the counterpart to acquisition, ownership, fame, is the true understanding of that non-ownership or impossibility to own/ anicca. Anicca is change. But just saying "everything is changing" is not personal enough. You want to see that, "Yes, everything is changing, but so am I, my experience, my ownership, my body, my senses, my feelings, my life, that is also SUBJECT to change". So that's why I'm saying that anicca is not about 'seeing impermanence' because you can't see the impermanence of your life unless you're dead. But then you can't see it. So if you wait for death, to show you that your life is subject to change then it's too late. And that's the whole point, saying that something is 'subject to change' means the possibility of change is inherent within it without that thing having to change.

Understanding that things are subject to change, subject to suffering means understanding that you should not wait for things to change to try to understand anicca. You want to understand it while it's not changing, while your life is there, You want to understand that it's overall and fundamentally going to change because it has arisen.

The nature of change is that nature of non-mastery, non-ownership, impossibility of control. You can control things within their arising, while they're present. You have a say in your life now, but fundamentally, you will not have a say when that life decides to change, as in when you start dying or when you die.

In terms of acquisitions, they escalate into honours, which escalate into fame, which is all the escalation of your sense of self. And In the course of practice, a monk would first remove the coarsest layer of conceit such as sensuality and anger, but then later on in the practice, he will be removing subtler acquisitions of his nationality, clan, family, cultural identifications etc

As for fame, it is inherently accepted and liked by people. Lack of fame is inherently feared by people. That's why people irrationally fear blame, even if there is no rational basis for the criticism, just because there is criticism at you, you're already defending against it, you don't want it. It takes a developed mind to not do that, to see through 'the worldly winds', and all of that comes from the simple appropriation of the very things that are in front of you, your very experience, these five aggregates, the feelings, the intentions etc. But if you contemplate that, not by saying 'this and that is impermanent', but by seeing that this experience is because my body with its senses, is here operating and I cannot do anything about that, it is subject to change and I am fundamentally not in control. I can move, I can say yes, I can say no, I can look this way. But all of that is within the non-control. All of that is within the basis that I have no access to, the basis of my aggregates. So, when they change, my entire domain, my entire world and life of control will be swept away with it. And when you can recognize that, through your experience right now that is in your 'control', you can recognize that fundamentally THIS is all subject to change. That's it, you don't have to wait for it to change, you don't have to make a change to prove to yourself that it's subject to change. You just need to stop acting out of it unwholesomely and discern that whether you want to or not, 'being subject to change' is implicit. That's what a thing is.

If you cultivate that perception of anicca, sustain it, maintain it in its being (*Bhavana*), it would result in complete fading away of all the acquisitions, dependence on honours, fame, notions of conceit.

Q: The mind will also not be upset by criticism.

Nm: What other people will think about you, justly or unjustly, ceases to be your concern. You will not lose perspective on account of that irrational fear of blame.

Q: And the pressure to make sure that others have the correct view of you...

NM: ...that's gone as well because that's rooted in your conceit.

You cannot control other people's opinions of you. Many people can understand that. But one thing is to understand that on a rational level, and another thing is to let that rational level settle in so that you're emotionally undisturbed in regard to blame and criticism [emotionally you cannot be touched, let alone mentally revolve around it]. And that's why you will be unable to lose perspective. So if somebody criticizes you, you will be absolutely clear about where they're coming from. And you could see if they have a point and you were wrong in that regard. You wouldn't have a problem admitting it either, because you're not irrationally defending your

conceit, your gratuitous ownership. Equally, if they criticise you baselessly, you realize that's absolutely ridiculous, or simple untrue or their criticism completely misses the point, and you wouldn't feel pressure to correct them and rectify the world and make sure that everybody knows the truth etc.

Q: 6-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of DUKKHA in ANICCA, an acute perception of fear/danger becomes settled in him toward indolence, laziness, slackness, heedlessness, lack of effort, and unreflectiveness, just as one would have fear towards one's executioner with a drawn-out sword...

Nm: The perception of danger needs to be established, the perception that change of an unfavourable kind can occur at any time. Once you recognise the weight of that situation, you will feel the discomfort which is inherent in the fact that your very being is not your own. In other words, if you recognise anicca correctly, you will be recognising the inherent discomfort of your situation, the dukkha will become apparent. And the clearer that perception is, the more of a 'sense of urgency' will develop.

Q: 7-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of non-self in what is Dukkha, his mind is devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external objects; it has overcome 'all measurements due to conceiving'(vidhāsamattikkantam) and is peaceful and well liberated...

NM: "Measurements due to conceiving" means what you conceive you appropriate. You are measured/defined by the things you appropriate (take as "mine"), such as your form, feelings, perceptions, intentions and consciousness. When those things change, you are thus affected. Removal of the conceivings on the other hand, means that whatever happens with the things you used to conceive will not affect you anymore. You will no longer be "measured" by it.